

# Strategies for Successful Distance Learning

## How to Be a Successful Distance Learner.



Welcome to Distance Learning. You may think this class will be different from what you're used to—show up for class, listen to the instructor, take some notes, read the book, do your assignments and study between class sessions.

Well, we have good news for you! Distance learning classes are not that much different from traditional classes—except that now there is a physical separation between you, your instructor and other students. By using telecommunications, students in several different locations can now meet together “live” as one big class. While you still ask questions, participate in class, take notes, do assignments and study between class sessions, learning at a distance may require you to make some adaptations.

This guide will give you practical suggestions for having a successful distance learning experience.

Motivation and self-discipline are the keys to success. Expect yourself to do well, and you will. This means that now it is up to you to plan, schedule and adjust to the distance learning environment. It means that you must be prompt for class each week and prepared with your assignments. It also means that one you are in class you must be considerate of the other students.

## What is a Telelearning Course?

A Telecourse is a type of class that generally included television programs, study guides, audio cassettes, video cassettes, computer software, Internet use, interactive sessions with your fellow classmates, study sessions, interaction with the instructor through telephone or microphone, interaction with a class facilitator and access to an Internet class portal—WebCT or Courseware Toolkit, which will help in managing the course activities.

Television courses have the same academic content and student outcome requirements as regular high school or college (on-campus) classes.

The big difference in distance learning courses and traditional on-campus classes is the manner in which instruction is given to students.

## Traditional Students:

?? Receive their classes directly from a faculty instructor.

## Tele-students:

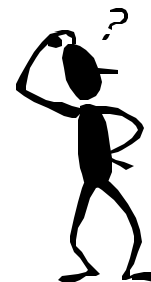
?? Work more independently by watching and interacting with the television and distance learning technologies and reading printed materials.

?? Talk with the instructor during class using microphones, telephones, computers (at home, office or school) and other communication tools.

?? Are often highly motivated and self-disciplined.

## Myths and Facts About Telecourses:

- Myth--** Telecourses are easier than regular classes at school or on-campus.  
**Fact--** In some ways they are more difficult because they require:
- ?? Self discipline.
  - ?? Time management.
  - ?? Excellent study skills.
- Myth--** Telecourses are like independent study.  
**Fact--** You need to maintain regular and frequent contact with you instructor.  
**Myth--** Telecourses are just watching TV and taking a couple of tests.  
**Fact--** Telecourses cover all of the same material as a regular class. You have to read textbooks, study guides, write papers and essays, do outside assignments and take tests. You also have to watch each program and participate in the class discussions. In addition, you are encouraged to form study groups outside of class.
- Myth--** You can wait until the end of the session to get everything done.  
**Fact--** Procrastination is the #1 reason for failure in a telecourse. You must keep up on you work on a weekly basis, just as you would in a regular school class.
- Myth--** Studying for a telecourse is no different than studying for a regular course.  
**Fact--** There are differences. Follow the suggestions in this guide and those your instructor gives you. Together, they will help you to become a successful telecourse student.

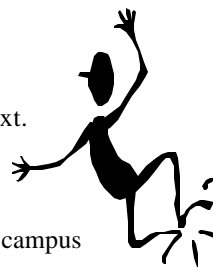


## Are Telecourses for Me?

How well will a telecourse fit your circumstances and lifestyle? Choose one answer for each question and score as directed.

1. My Need to take this course is:
  - a. High—I need it immediately for a degree or job.
  - b. Moderate—I could take it on-campus later or substitute another course.
  - c. Low—It's a personal interest that could be postponed.
2. Feeling that I am part of a class is:
  - a. Not particularly necessary to me.
  - b. Somewhat important to me.
  - c. Very Important to me.
3. I would classify myself as someone who:
  - a. Often gets things done ahead of time.
  - b. Needs reminding to get things done on time.
  - c. Puts things off until the last minute.
4. Classroom discussion is:
  - a. Rarely helpful to me.
  - b. Sometimes helpful to me.
  - c. Almost always helpful to me.
5. When an instructor gives directions for an assignment, I prefer:
  - a. To figure out the instructions myself.
  - b. Try to follow directions on my own, and then ask for help.
  - c. Have the instructions explained to me.
6. I need instructor comments on my assignments:
  - a. Within a few weeks so I can review what I did.
  - b. Within a few days, or I forget what I did.
  - c. Right away, or I get very frustrated.
7. Considering my professional and personal schedule, the amount of time I have to work on a telecourse is:
  - a. More than enough for a campus class or telecourse.
  - b. The same as for a class on campus.
  - c. Less than for a class on campus.

8. When I am asked to use VCR's, computers, voice mail, email, or other new technologies:
  - a. I look forward to learning new skills.
  - b. I feel apprehensive, but try anyway.
  - c. I put it off or try to avoid it.
9. As a reader, I would classify myself as:
  - a. Good—I usually understand the text without help.
  - b. Average—I sometimes need help to understand the text.
  - c. Slower than average.
10. If I have to go to campus to take exams or complete work:
  - a. I can go to campus anytime.
  - b. I may miss some lab assignments or exam deadlines if campus labs are not open on evenings or weekends.
  - c. I will have difficulty getting to the campus, even in the evenings and weekends.



## Are Telecourses for Me? Some Answers.

The questionnaire that you have just taken reflects some of the facts about taking a telecourse. Below are some responses that may help you decide if this kind of class is for you.

1. Telecourse students can end up neglecting telecourses because of personal or professional circumstances unless they have compelling reasons for taking the course.
2. Some students prefer the independence of a telecourse; other find it uncomfortable.
3. Telecourses give students greater freedom of scheduling but they can require more self-discipline than on-campus classes.
4. Some people learn best by interacting with other students and the instructor. Telecourses require greater attention to interacting properly and effectively.
5. Telecourses often require you to work from written directions with face-to-face instructions.
6. It may take (for some instructors) as long as two weeks to get comments back by mail from your instructor. The use of email is greatly reducing this time. Student access to email is becoming a priority for on-line courses.
7. Telecourses take at least as much time as on-campus courses.
8. Telecourses use technology for teaching and communicating. You should become familiar with these technologies.
9. Printed materials in paper form or posted on a web-based portal such as WebCT or Courseware Toolkit are the primary source for directions and information in telecourses.
10. Some telecourse may require an on-campus orientation and review sessions, exams and even laboratory activities. Flexibility is important.

## Distance Learning Students and Courses.

### Distance Learning Students:

- ?? Enroll in classes the same way they would enroll in any other high school or college course taught at the school.
- ?? Pay tuition or fees (if required by the school)
- ?? Have access to the same student services as regular students.
- ?? Receive a grade and credit like any other school class.
- ?? Study and participate in class like any other class at school.
- ?? Make academic and instructional decisions.

### **A Distance Learning Class Has:**

- ?? Televised instruction and class interaction and participation.
- ?? Cameras and microphones in the classroom—generally operated by a site facilitator.
- ?? High student expectations.
- ?? Students that need to be highly motivated and self-disciplined.
- ?? Students that need to know how to use microphones and other related technologies properly.
- ?? Students that need to participate in class by interacting with the instructor and the students at other sites.

### **Why Take a Telecourse?**

#### **Distance education students enroll in telecourses:**

##### **For Access**

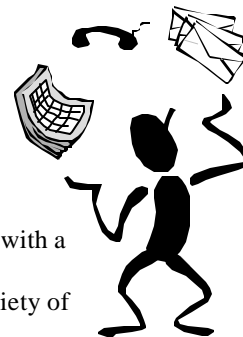
- ?? Distance learning classes are often specialized high school or college classes necessary for high-tech, high paying careers.
- ?? You may earn college credit in high school for some telecourses.
- ?? Distance learning often brings classes into the high school or extension centers that ordinarily may not be provided because of time or location.

##### **For Location**

- ?? Distance learning classes are conveniently offered in your own school or community.

##### **For Excellence in Instruction**

- ?? Distance learning instructors are often highly creative, experienced instructors with a demonstrated talent for teaching and working with students.
- ?? Distance learning courses are well prepared, planned and produced using a variety of teaching styles, guest speakers, and multimedia techniques.



### **How do Students Access Course Material?**

#### **In Distance Learning.**

- ?? The class is held in modified classrooms in the school, college or training center.
- ?? There are often 3 or more classes like you own, where students in other locations are involved in the class.
- ?? Microphones are provided for you to talk to the instructor and other students. Site coordinators and your instructor will you how to use them properly.
- ?? Television cameras and TV sets are in the classroom—usually operated by the site facilitator. Don't be distracted by the camera or the other pieces of equipment in the room. You'll get used to them quickly.
- ?? Instructors expect you to participate in this kind of class as much as in other classes.

### **Printed Materials.**

- ?? Telecourse teachers provide guides or other course outline. These are to be followed throughout the course.
- ?? You may be required to purchase books and other materials for the class.
- ?? Arrangements may be made ahead of time (with the permission of the instructor) to videotape the class. The tapes are not, however, a substitute for attending class.

### **Interacting With Your Instructor**

- ?? Your success is determined by your interaction with the course advisor, the instructor, and other students.
- ?? Distance learning instructors may visit your school or receiving site to meet the class.
- ?? Interaction involves orientations, lectures, seminars, guest speakers, laboratory activities, writing workshops, group discussions, group presentations to the rest of the class, fax transmissions, telephone calls, quizzes, texts, returned assignments, text chats online, posting to bulletin boards, Internet presentations, Webquest, voice chats in moderated discussions, and other methods not yet facilitated by technology!

### **How Can I be Successful in my Telecourse?**

#### **Understand how the Class Functions.**

- ?? Take Responsibility for your own success; don't expect instructor to do it for you.
- ?? When using the microphone, identify yourself and your location when you have a question.
- ?? Use names when addressing the instructor and other students.
- ?? Study the class outline to understand what's going on.
- ?? Take the opportunity to get to know other students.
- ?? Get to know your site facilitator.
- ?? Know how you will be graded. If unsure, ask your instructor.
- ?? Determine if you will be graded on what is in the textbook, quizzes, your notes, and/or class participation.
- ?? Understand how the homework will be handled in class.
- ?? Make sure your questions are answered. Ask for feedback.
- ?? Interrupt politely when you do not understand the material.



#### **Be A Good Student.**

- ?? Be willing to ask questions.
- ?? Always bring a notebook, pens and the course outline to class.
- ?? After each class, write a brief review and summarize your notes.
- ?? Show respect for the opinions and ideas of others.
- ?? Don't make smart remarks or unkind comments – the microphones will pick them up.
- ?? Try the instructor's suggestions.
- ?? Listen to other students' questions and responses.
- ?? Practice good note taking and listening skills (*See the section On Studying and Note Taking Skills*)
- ?? Let the instructor know how you are doing.
- ?? Be prepared for class.
- ?? Be on time for class.
- ?? Participate in a study group, for review if one is available; if not, form your own group.
- ?? Practice good study skills (*See section on study skills*).

## **Distance Learning Requires Attention to Classroom Etiquette.**

- ?? You are expected to participate in class.
- ?? You are expected to be considerate of others.

Unnecessary noise caused by talking in class, side conversations, Rustling papers, rattling soda cans, eating or general room shuffling is amplified throughout the system in a distance learning environment. These noises are very distracting, making it extremely difficult to concentrate on what is being said.

## **Technology in the Classroom.**

1. Sit within easy range of the microphone so it is easily accessible.
2. If your microphone has an on/off switch, always have it in the “off” position when it is not in use.
3. When using the microphone, ALWAYS state your name and your site location first. For example: “This is Tom Lewis from Lakeview.”
4. If you are having difficulty hearing the instructor, ask the site facilitator for assistance.

## **How to Use the Microphone.**

1. Turn the microphone to the “on” position.
2. Signal your question. (Interrupt instructor by tapping the mic or interrupting at an appropriate time).
3. Identify yourself and your site.
4. Be concise. You may want to write out your questions first.
5. Be specific – don’t ramble.
6. Speak Clearly.
7. Ask for clarification or verification that you have been understood.
8. Turn the microphone “off” when finished to avoid embarrassing and disruptive interruptions.



## **On-Air Etiquette.**

1. Be prepared with all course materials. (Textbook, paper, pens).
2. Arrive on time.
3. Show respect for other speakers and learners.
4. Be attentive. Keep focused on what’s happening on the monitor.
5. Don’t dominate the conversation.

## How Can I Study Better When Taking a Telecourse?

### Developing Good Study Skills.

?? Ask your instructor or course advisor what material will be included on the test such as:

1. Key terms, definitions, important people, places, and dates.
2. Lists of information or facts.
3. Points emphasized by the instructor or speaker during his/her lectures.
4. Questions at the end of the text chapter.
5. Questions in the study guide.
6. Attend review sessions or study with an informal group.
7. Get additional information on items to be studied.
8. Plan ahead for reviews.

### How Do I Study for a Telecourse?

- ?? Find out what type of test will be given – multiple choice, essay, fill in blanks, or true/false.
- ?? Check the course outline.
- ?? Call the instructor or course advisor.
- ?? Develop good study habits.
- ?? Determine exactly what the test will cover.
- ?? Collect your material – notes, course outline, tapes, and guides.
- ?? Organize material for each chapter or section.
- ?? Predict test questions.
- ?? Answer questions at the end of each chapter.
- ?? Review questions from previous exams.
- ?? Make up your own questions based on the material covered.
- ?? Condense your materials into key concepts, definitions, dates, details, and lists.
- ?? Learn Mnemonics or memory tricks to remember the material. (See the section on memory tricks).
- ?? Set study schedule and stick to it.



### When Should I Study for a Telecourse?

- ?? Decide on a day and time that works best for you.
- ?? Divide the material into manageable sections. Study one section each day.
- ?? Depending on how much material is to be studied, start several days before the test.
- ?? Start with most difficult material.
- ?? Review daily all previously learned material before starting the new material.
- ?? Review everything the evening before the test and the day of the test.
- ?? Stay as close to your regular sleep time as possible each day. Go to sleep immediately after studying.

## How Can I do my Best When Taking a Telecourse Test?

1. Bring appropriate materials for the test (pencil, paper, calculator).
2. Arrive on time.
3. If you are trying to keep an important formula or list in mind, write it down as soon as you receive the test.
4. Look over the test and the total number of items. Check the point values and estimate how much time should be spent on each item.
5. Read the directions carefully. This will help you answer the questions.
6. Underline key terms and steps in the directions.
7. Answer the easiest questions first.
8. Expect memory blocks. Skip difficult questions and go on to the others. Then, if time permits, return to the difficult questions.
9. Answer every question, if possible. If incorrect answers are not penalized, make guesses.
10. Write your answers as neatly and legibly as possible.
11. Work at your own pace. Don't be concerned if others finish before you.
12. If time permits, review the questions and answers.

## How do I Write a Good Answer to an Essay Question When Taking a Telecourse Exam?

1. Understand the question. Know what the instructor is looking for.
2. Strive for a complete answer. State your ideas careful.
3. Use facts and logic. Show you knowledge, not opinions.
4. Be concise. Don't ramble. Stick to the main points.
5. Be natural and sincere. No "snow" jobs.
6. Organize your answer intelligently. Follow a logical sequence.
7. Keep your answer simple. Avoid being vague.
8. Try to restate the instructor's "pet" ideas in your own words.

## How Can I Remember What I've Learned During the Telecourse?

1. Think positively. Plan to remember and you will.
2. Organize the material to be learned.
  - a. Group items by classification and commonalities
  - b. Divide lists in chunks of 4-6 items.
  - c. Arrange items into some meaningful order.
3. Test yourself repeatedly on the material to be remembered.
  - a. Repetition is the key to remembering
  - b. See it, look away, say it, write it, and listen to it.
4. Space memory work over several sessions.
  - a. Start at least one week before the test.
  - b. Review previously learned material each session
  - c. Start with the most difficult material first.
  - d. Review everything the night before and the day of the test.
5. Over learn the material
  - a. Keep going over everything you've learned
  - b. Give yourself enough time to fully "digest" the material
6. Study right before going to sleep.
7. Use flash cards. Carry them with you and study when you can.





### How Can I use my Time More Effectively When I am Taking a Telecourse?

1. Set goals.
  - a. Write out reasons for taking this course.
  - b. Does this course fit in with your other academic and personal goals?
  - c. Write a contract with yourself.
  - d. What is the grade you want?
  - e. How much time are you willing to spend?
  - f. How will you reward yourself when you reach your goal?
2. Use a monthly calendar
  - a. During your orientation, fill in important dates
  - b. Note test days and study days. Stick to them.
  - c. Determine test review dates and time your instructor will be available by phone or email.
3. Schedule for success.
  - a. Take a realistic view of your weekly schedule and set aside regular study times.
4. Reinforce yourself.
  - a. Reward yourself when you stay on schedule.

### How Can I Keep From Procrastinating When Taking a Telecourse?

1. Follow the suggestions in this guide.
2. Break tasks down into manageable pieces.
3. Keep a time log for a day to identify “timewasters.”
4. Make a “5 minute commitment.” Organize your material for 5 minutes so you can get to it later. Often, the 5-minute commitment gets you started for a 30-minute study session.

### How Can I Take Better Notes During a Telecourse?

Try this recommended note taking system:

1. Use full-size paper, (8.5 x 11)—nothing too small or your notes will be too fragmented.
2. Begin by drawing a vertical line down the middle of your paper.
3. The space on the right side of the line is where you will write you notes during the lecture/presentation.
4. The left column is for key words or main points that sum up the detailed information in the right column.
5. It’s better to do your writing in the left column immediately after the lecture. That way, you will be writing from the perspective of the entire lecture and will, therefore, have a better idea of what the main points are. Waiting until after the lecture also provides a reason to review the information while it is still fresh in your mind.

Write keyword ideas or phrase in this section after the class lecture or video.	Write your classroom notes here. Be as specific or generic as you want. This information forms the answers to questions you will ask yourself later.
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Some additional ideas on note taking:

- ?? Skim related material in the textbook and course outline before class.
- ?? Use the recommended note taking system.
- ?? If in doubt about what, when or how much to write, make the mistake of writing too much rather than too little. Before long you’ll find the right balance.
- ?? Think visually. Write in phrases. Use abbreviated words.
- ?? As soon as possible, review your notes.

Remember, the notes you take during class will save you valuable time in the future.

These materials were prepared from “Distance Learning: A Resource Guide for K-12 Student, For 2-way Technologies,” ? 1994, Utah Education Network, 101 Wasatch Drive, Dolores Dore Eccles Broadcast Center, Salt Lake City, Utah 84112. Written by George T. W. Miller Jr. EDNET Faculty Training Specialist at Utah State Office of Education.

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